Remarks of Ambassador Richard Olson
to support the USDA Wheat Productivity Enhancement Project
May 8, 2013
National Agriculture Research Center, Islamabad

As delivered

Assalamu Alaikum.

I am honored to be here at the National Agricultural Research Center (NARC) this morning to recognize the important progress made by the Wheat Productivity Enhancement Project, a U.S.-Pakistan partnership to fight diseases affecting wheat in Pakistan.

We all know that a healthy agricultural sector is crucial for food security and the economies of both Pakistan and the United States. Wheat is a major part of Pakistan's agricultural sector – 24 million tons of wheat were grown on 8.5 million hectares in 2012.

Wheat is also an important part of the American agricultural system. As a result, the United States and Pakistan have worked together to improve agricultural yields for more than 50 years.

The "Green Revolution" in Pakistan started when American scientist Dr. Norman Borlaug and Pakistani scientists developed a highly productive, disease-resistant wheat variety known as "Mexi-Pak." This cooperation helped Pakistan's wheat production to double in the five year period between 1965 and 1970.

Our agricultural cooperation has had other major achievements as well. American and Pakistani scientists introduced the kinnow to Pakistan in the 1960s. We also helped to establish the National Agricultural Research Center. And now, U.S.-Pakistan cooperation in agriculture extends to improving the production of mangoes and dairy products, and to the fight against virulent diseases in Pakistan's most important crops and livestock.

Our partnership to improve wheat yields is especially important because wheat accounts for about 60% of the daily caloric intake of the average Pakistani.

The Wheat Productivity Enhancement Project continues the tradition of U.S.–Pakistan cooperation to improve wheat harvests and fight diseases. This project introduced the disease resistant variety of wheat that we saw harvested today.

This variety, known as "NARC 2011," is resistant to an extremely virulent form of wheat rust, called UG 99. Left without resistant varieties such as "NARC 2011," experts estimate that Pakistan's annual wheat harvest could be reduced by as much as 50% if UG 99 would arrive in Pakistan.

The Wheat Productivity Enhancement Project also provided the new harvesting machines that we see here today, and funded improvements to research stations around Pakistan to develop more disease-resistant wheat. In addition, this project provides specialized training programs in the United States, Mexico, and Kenya to Pakistani scientists.

All of this cooperation leads to increased incomes for Pakistani farmers, improves nutrition for the millions of Pakistanis who depend on wheat daily, and ensures that Pakistan can secure its most important food sources.

The United States will continue to support agriculture in Pakistan. This U.S. commitment includes projects to help fight animal diseases, increase vegetable production, and improve irrigation.

We are honored to be partners with and have with us today a group of farmers. I look forward to hearing their experiences and ideas about wheat farming in Pakistan.

Thank you for your attention.

Khuda Hafez.

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